

Members of the Council, Department heads, and local citizens, the state of the city is strong and continues to get stronger. I realize that line is clichéd and versions of it are echoed in city halls, courthouses, state capitals and the U.S. capital every year, but I would argue that as we sit here tonight truer words have never been spoken. I couldn't be more proud to be a part of the elected and appointed team that guides and implements the policies of this great city.

Before I take a look ahead at what we hope to accomplish, let's take one last look at what has been done over the past 12 months. The year 2015 was one with many accomplishments. If there is one theme that ties them all together, it is that we're turning old to new again.

In the span of April through December, downtown Versailles took center stage by hosting many great events. Last year saw the first of what we all hope will be the annual Spark Versailles event. This project, the brainchild and product of the hard work of the WCHS Community Activism class, focused on the potential of our downtown and its ability to attract a young crowd. Witnessing the creativity and the love they have of our community gives us great hope for Versailles' future. It was another great year for Art in the Park, with vendors along Park Street. 2016 will mark the 7th year for this much anticipated gathering of talent. On July 4 the all day celebration of our nation's independence, capped with a return of fireworks at the county park, was well-received and well-attended. It bears mentioning again that the cost to taxpayers was almost halved from the years before thanks to the efforts of a great group of dedicated and hard-working volunteers. In August, the much anticipated Twilight Festival, which is a partnership between the City and Chamber of Commerce, was again put on without a hitch. People enjoyed the day of entertainment and vendors. Our Christmas parade drew the largest crowd in recent memory, and they weren't disappointed by the quality of the entries. Throughout the summer, the Versailles Merchants Association continued hosting a Block Party each month with a band and vendors on Green Street accompanied by later shopping hours. We look forward to all of these events again this year.

There has been progress made by Holly Wiedemann and AU associates in preserving the old Versailles elementary school building as an adaptive reuse project. This project is turning that space into something with a great purpose by providing affordable housing to our local senior citizens.

On the public works front, we have moved into the design phase of our Wastewater Treatment plant expansion. This is the largest project ever undertaken by the City of Versailles and was necessitated by various factors including aging infrastructure, changing technology, and stricter environmental regulations. When this project is completed, our water and wastewater systems will be poised to provide clean drinking water and safe sanitary sewer discharge for at least two decades. Financing this \$20 million improvement took great political courage from this Council. It would have been easy to kick the proverbial can down the road and apply a series of band-aids, thereby making it the problem of future Councils and Mayors. You all knew taking that approach might have cost less in the short term but would have been egregiously irresponsible and ultimately much more expensive over time. The Water & Sewer Committee, along with staff and contracted engineers, have spent countless hours over a two year period making sure

these decisions were made in a wise manner. Fortunately, the sale of the remainder of our marketable property on Grassy Springs will help offset some utility bills in the future.

In another matter affecting utilities, we are nearing completion of the water line improvement that stretches from Huntertown Road to Merewood. This project's impact is substantial in that it enhances water pressure and allows for better fire protection for many industrial and residential customers.

We were greeted with good news several weeks ago when the state announced approval of our grant application to build sidewalks along the entire stretch of Old Dry Ridge Road. This project will give two of our newer neighborhoods safe and easy access to an existing path and to Southside Elementary.

We also got approval to construct sidewalks on Simmons Street and continuing down Huntertown Road, which has long been one of the most dangerous routes for pedestrians. Having numerous homes and two schools in the area make this project essential to improve safety and livability on that side of town. These projects are the culmination of both vision and hard work, and the Huntertown Road project could not have become reality without the smooth partnership of our counterparts in County government.

At Rose Crest Cemetery, rules have been updated for better use of the new pavilion that will provide families a place to say their final goodbyes to loved ones. Additionally, there is now a designated area for urn burials to provide our citizens more opportunities for this growing trend. Work was completed on the new storage building at Versailles Cemetery and will benefit our employees and equipment.

At City Hall, we invested in this beautiful building where we now sit, doing work on the façade that has improved both safety and appearance. We also completed a large project last year that converted our utility billing software. With very few hiccups – and none of our making – this massive undertaking was done smoothly and with tremendous care by our capable staff. The software for our budgeting and payroll was concurrently updated and we are maximizing this technology to provide our department heads the real-time information needed to manage the day-to-day finances of the city. The software for tax collection will be converted this year.

Our police department continues to maintain involvement in the community and in our schools in order to provide our citizens – and particularly our youth - positive interactions with our uniformed officers. The department's K-9 unit is going strong and is helping detect illegal substances that are being moved around our community. Our special response team, meanwhile, is training regularly so it can respond to emergency situations anywhere in the county on short notice. Accountability and protection of our officers continues to expand with the current level of body cameras rising to 15 over the past year, and more are planned in the near future. In the coming year, the force will continue targeting drug traffickers and the significant damage they bring to our community, their impact having torn apart too many families.

On the capital side, the community deserves a better police station than the one the department now operates from. We demand a police force that is worthy of this great community and we should provide facilities that are worthy of these individuals who dedicate themselves to public safety. This brings me to the old middle school and the possibilities that unique property holds for our community.

This building has a history that personally affects many of us in this room. Unfortunately, much time has passed since that building became empty, and that time hasn't been kind. The structure is in disrepair and, despite several attempts, has proven unworkable by private investors. The opportunity exists, however, for the City government to look at that property as something we can adapt to house a new police station and potentially other city services. While other potential sites exist, we owe it to the community to take a serious look at this building, attempting to mirror the expected success of the adaptive reuse of Versailles Elementary. We should pledge to do everything we can to make that property productive again. My goal will remain that we first look at existing buildings and target city resources to promote infill and redevelopment throughout our urban core.

It was another successful year for our fire department. We received a grant in the amount of \$121,000 to apply toward construction of a fire training tower on Huntertown Road which will make us the envy of many central Kentucky fire departments and strengthen our location for degree programs and training opportunities. Bluegrass Community & Technical College is now holding classes at the fire training center for its Associates Degree in Fire Science program as well as conducting EMT courses. We are proud to host this program and hope to expand upon our higher education relationships going forward.

The department faces some challenges for the future, however. We need a new ladder truck and we must make this a priority. As for the firefighters themselves, the Council has expressed a desire to review issues surrounding staffing and compensation and that comprehensive review continues to move forward at the committee level.

Our interlocal agreements are now functioning smoothly. As we will hear later, Rich Pictor has some things lined up for Parks & Recreation that will further make our park a tool we can use to attract people into our community. Drew Chandler has performed well since assuming the duties of Emergency Management Director. During our recent snowstorm – for which our snow removal staff should also be complimented – Drew provided regular updates and was a constant presence throughout the event.

This Council must also continue down the path to ensure that blighted property is unacceptable in every part of town. In the past couple of years we have taken the bold step of condemning and ultimately demolishing one of the largest eyesores this community has ever seen. That decision to remove Versailles Center proved to be one that will reap great benefits going forward, and we must ramp up our efforts to enforce the highest reasonable standards for maintaining property in commercial and residential areas. Recent passage of the ordinance relating to junked cars was another step in the right direction.

If there is one thing I think we will best be remembered for, it is our efforts in promoting economic development. Thanks to our decision to level Versailles Center, we are mere weeks away from the formal announcement of a hotel being constructed there. This overdue project will meet a persistent need we have had lend us credibility as a tourist attraction and, coupled with other projects, make us a potential trailhead of the famed Kentucky Bourbon Trail. The Bourbon Trail attracts nearly 900,000 tourists per year, and we should take full advantage of this situation.

This Council took another wise step last month and approved entering into a contract with an economic development coordinator for the City of Versailles. This newly created position will only further improve our ability to ensure that our large industrial employers and small businesses have another level of support from their city government. This also allows us to assess what we have to offer in the way of property and buildings and to better market our community to potential employers. Our current businesses are appreciative of what we are doing, considering the recent expansion announcements from Quad Graphics and OSRAM Sylvania.

Our downtown, which is the face of our great city, is also receiving much attention. Work continues on the pavilion project and further improving and incorporating Big Spring Park into our downtown. There has been expressed interest from private funding sources interested in seeing this vision brought to fruition.

An ambitious effort to attract a critical mass of people to live, work and play in our downtown must be our goal. This is the only way to guarantee that our existing downtown businesses will remain successful and to attract new investment in our urban core. To that end, I would like to explore the possibility of creating a local TIF district encompassing Main Street from Versailles Elementary to the old St. Leo's school property and extending eastward along the Lexington Street corridor to U.S. 60. This is a primary entrance into our downtown and it must be made into a world class gateway that will serve as a source of pride for our citizens and an attraction for visitors. The TIF district would allow investors to recoup some of their costs for capital improvements, expand our tax base, and maintain this area as our economic, tourism, and cultural center.

Despite the controversy surrounding it, I am repeating my pledge to support and work towards completion of the much needed Northwest Connector Road. This new arterial passageway would relieve our downtown traffic and allow us to take full advantage of opportunities presented by a pedestrian-friendly downtown. Its impact on smaller residential areas is no less significant.

Work completed over the years has put us into a position to capitalize on economic opportunities in the very near future. The recent announcements concerning Edgewood Farm are another prime example. The news that Lifepoint is willing to upgrade its presence with a brand new facility signifies its long-term commitment to the community. This allows them to operate a more efficient and profitable hospital while providing health services to our citizens

and those who work and visit. It will take courage and toughness from all of us to see this project to its completion.

We should continue pursuing opportunities to create trails for walking and biking. Our entire city must be connected through these routes and I believe a connection with the Woodford Reserve Distillery would benefit all of Woodford County. Recreational trails enhance quality of life, attract visitors, and are economic development drivers that attract future residents and businesses to move to our community.

Last month we were updated on our audit for FY 15. Thanks to conservative management practices from our department heads, the results were amazing. We are on solid financial footing going forward. Our rainy day fund is intact and our revenue sources appear to be growing, all while expenses are managed soundly.

Another item I will be bringing before the Council is the suggestion that we follow the steps put forth by the Kentucky League of Cities to become a certified city of ethics. What this entails is a review of our ethics code to make certain everything is covered, along with comprehensive training for us and members of the Board of Ethics. It lets the community know that we take ethics seriously.

In addition, I will ask the Council to consider enacting laws that require basic protection for domestic animals. This does not mean that dogs will be guaranteed accommodations like a Holiday Inn Express, but simply sets minimum standards for food, water, tethering and shelter in extreme conditions. The data is clear that abuse and neglect of animals is a precursor to violence against humans. Plus, it is the right thing to do.

I would be remiss if I didn't bring attention to those who are too often glossed over: the folks in our community who have fallen on hard times. We are blessed with people of compassion as our neighbors as was evidenced by the outpouring of love, support, and assistance when a family in our community was met with an unspeakable tragedy. If we do nothing else, continuing to aid our fellow citizens in need is what showcases how truly wonderful our piece of this earth is. I receive quite a few calls from people who need help. Fortunately, organizations exist in this community that are willing to help them when resources permit. Let's keep these folks in mind as we contemplate how best to serve this great city. Ignoring the needs of those less fortunate is a great disservice to all.

It has been said that you will never plow a field by turning it over in your mind. We have a lot of great ideas among us. Let's make them realities. Our city has more opportunities than ever before. It's up to us to decide whether or not to take advantage of them. To the Council I will say that history shows that for every action, there is an equal and opposite criticism. Everyone won't always agree. We should pursue open and honest discussion on the issues facing us. But change, however scary it might seem, is not our enemy...complacency is. The easiest way to govern is to do nothing. Let's take the hard road, because it leads to a better place. My vision for our community is to elevate economic development, public safety, tourism, and quality of life. These should be our top priorities. I ask for your support in implementing this

vision and for us to continue to work together in the future. Thank you to all in this room for the roles you play in moving us forward.